

27th March 2020

Dear parents/carers

I hope that this letter finds you and your family well and adapting as best you can to the extraordinary circumstances in which we find ourselves. I write today to update you on what the school has been doing in order that we can offer the very best support and reassurance to your son/daughter.

We know by monitoring our Show My Homework system that the majority of our students have engaged in the online schoolwork that staff are setting. We have become aware that the volume of materials and variety of platforms that the work is in, from your point of view, appear complicated and a little overwhelming. I hope that you will appreciate the very short timescale staff had to create this resource base. We thought at first that it would only be needed for one or two weeks. Staff are working hard to tidy this up and now plan in the expectation that school may not return to normal until the summer term or even September. The upside to this is that I am reassured that our staff are putting more than enough work on our portals.

I am also conscious that the timetable suggested in an earlier letter may be appearing idealistic to say the least. I would like to reassure parents that there can be no expectation that you take on the role of home schooling your son/daughter. We understand that it will be challenging enough supporting them in staying engaged with schoolwork over the weeks ahead. We know that some children have little access to computers and that families are sharing them for schoolwork and to work from home. In short you will have found that it is impossible to replicate the school timetable and we understand that. The main thing is that you support your son/daughter in completion of as much schoolwork that you can in your own circumstances. Be reassured that it is not a race or competition to complete the work set; it is not realistic. Nor is it realistic for me to promise that teachers will be able to look and feedback on it all. We are all in the same unusual boat!

We are all coming to terms with new ways of living and finding some new family opportunities. In the circumstances these should be seen as golden opportunities. Exercising with Joe Wicks (9am on YouTube), cooking or baking, free writing (a diary of these times), drawing/artwork, listening to audiobooks or podcasts are all good ways to spend time. You will be particularly pleased if you can get them to join in with the cleaning/housework or clearing up the shed or garden! Above all the opportunity to read as much and as often as possible will help to broaden minds.

We have decided to develop a series of regular contact bulletins over and above the work set online. Each week your son/daughter's form tutor or a member of their house team will contact them by email. The purpose of this email is to reassure them and check for any ways in which the tutor can help. Attached to the email will also be a bulletin with tips and suggestions to interest them. We appreciate that this system will not be foolproof. It is dependent on the health and availability of our staff and the engagement of your son/daughter. We will check its success as we go. If we do not get responses from your son/daughter, I am sure that you will understand that the staff will contact you.

For our Year 11 and 13 students, we still have no detailed information on how examination grades will be calculated. We do know that they will be based on teacher assessments. These will use information on how students previously achieved in school, coursework completed and teachers' expectations of their performance if this summer's exams had gone ahead. It

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is worth me reinforcing my previous messages here that, in many ways, this may be a fairer way of assessing your son/daughter than the traditional examinations system.

As soon as we have more information on this, we will let you and all our students know. Meanwhile, it is important that they all continue with their studies, covering aspects of the curriculum that will help them into the next academic year where they may be planning to join our sixth form, move into work/training or go to university.

While we understand that students are anxious, I would ask that they do not contact staff for details or indications of what they might receive as exam grades. Teachers are unable to give this and will have to decline any requests for information. For Year 13 students there will be more information coming to you from the sixth form team.

We understand the extra challenge for those families who receive free school meals for their son/daughter. By now you should have received the first electronic supermarket vouchers. These will be sent regularly. Given the extraordinary challenges at this time we have decided to provide these additionally throughout the Easter break. Please do let us know if you are not receiving them.

A primary concern is for the safety of our students. I am glad now that all families have found suitable arrangements to keep their children safe. This is in keeping with the Prime Minister's instruction that we should maximise social distancing and stay in our homes. If any of the families that we initially contacted, or those of key workers, have changed circumstances and you are not able to safely care for your children, then please contact us. In conjunction with Hillingdon Local Authority we can advise on support alternatives.

Can I also ask that you encourage your son/daughter through their own social media to dissuade others that they are in contact with from breaking the social distancing rules. Unfortunately, we have had reports from the police that some young people are still endangering us all by meeting in groups in public places.

Can I thank you all again for your calls and emails, many of which have and continue to shape what we are trying to do. This feedback is valuable and appreciated. I encourage all parents to continue to do this.

If you need to contact us, although our telephone switchboard is not always staffed, voicemails are being continuously monitored remotely during normal opening hours. When calling please leave your name, the nature of your enquiry and a return contact number. Or, please feel free to email the school on office@uhs.org.uk. This account is also monitored remotely. We will endeavour to respond where needed as quickly as we can. Please also do tell us if your email, phone number or any personal details change so that we can keep our records up to date.

Finally, can I offer my thoughts to you and families in these difficult circumstances and particularly those who are protecting vulnerable loved ones. Keeping us all safe and well is our overriding priority.

Yours faithfully



N B Clemens
Principal